

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PA-02 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-02 L-03

FEA-01 /056 W

----- 032046

R 082205Z SEP 76

FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 702

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMCONSUL MONTREAL

UNCLAS QUEBEC 222

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, CA

SUBJECT: GENERAL STRIKE HITS QUEBEC CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

REF: QUEBEC 210

1. WALKOUT WHICH BEGAN AT JAMES BAY HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT LG-2 (REFTEL) HAS NOW SPREAD TO MOST COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL CONSTRUCTION SITES IN QUEBEC, VIRTUALLY SHUTTING DOWN THE PROVINCE S IMPORTANT CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY. SOME 60 PERCENT OF THE 150,000 REGISTERED CONSTRUCTION EMPLOYEES IN PROVINCE WERE REPORTEDLY ABSENT YESTERDAY AND NUMBER IS EXPECTED TO GROW TODAY IN RESPONSE TO GENERAL STRIKE CALL BY CONSTRUCTION WING OF QUEBEC FEDERATION OF LABOR (QFL). THE QFL REPRESENTS MAJORITY OF QUEBEC CONSTRUCTION WORKERS AND, BASED ON RESULTS OF LAST FALL S VOTING IN INDUSTRY, ACTS AS SOLE REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH MANAGEMENT.

2. ALTHOUGH WORKERS BEGAN WALKING OFF CONSTRUCTION SITES ENMASSE LAST WEEK, THE QFL MADE ITS GENERAL STRIKE CALL ONLY YESTERDAY, APPARENTLY BECAUSE OF DISSENTION WITHIN ITS RANKS. CONSTRUCTION WORKERS HAVE HAD THE LEGAL RIGHT TO STRIKE SINCE JULY 31 AND RECENTLY HAVE VOTED AGAINST ACCEPTANCE MANAGEMENT OFFERS. SEVERAL GROUPS WITHIN THE QFL, HOWEVER,
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REMAIN OPPOSED TO A GENERAL WALKOUT, NOTABLY THE POWERFUL

PLUMBERS AND PIPEFITTERS UNION WHICH REPORTEDLY IS INVITING ITS MEMBERS TO GO AND WORK OUTSIDE QUEBEC. A SPOKESMAN FOR QFL RIVAL CONFEDERATION OF NATIONAL TRADE UNIONS (CNTU), WHICH REPRESENTS SOME 45,000 OF QUEBEC CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, SAID CNTU MEMBERS WOULD RESPECT PICKET LINES ALTHOUGH THEY THEMSELVES HAD VOTED NOT TO WALK OUT.

3. COMMENT: THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT STRIKE MAY BE OF LONG DURATION. VARIOUS ISSUES INVOLVED ARE COMPLEX AND THERE IS WIDE GAP BETWEEN UNION DEMANDS AND MANAGEMENT OFFERS. ON MANAGEMENT SIDE, INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES ARE ALLOWING SITUATION TO CLARIFY BEFORE TAKING ANY COUNTER ACTION. SOME MANAGEMENT BELIEVE THAT MAJORITY OF WORKERS NOT IN FAVOR OF STRIKE AND THAT DEPECFIONS WILL EVENTUALLY BREAK STRIKE. PROVINCIAL GOV T, WHICH EARLIER THIS YEAR EXTENDED EXPIRING CONTRACT BY DECREE IN ORDER ASSURE OLYMPIC OPENING, HAS YET TO SHOW ANY INCLINATION TO INTERVENE IN PRESENT CONFLICT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY, LABOR STRIKES, ELECTRIC POWER PLANTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976QUEBEC00222
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760340-0237
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760981/aaaacctr.tel
Line Count: 80
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 QUEBEC 210
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: cahillha
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 FEB 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 FEB 2004 by MaustMC>; APPROVED <14 JAN 2005 by cahillha>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GENERAL STRIKE HITS QUEBEC CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY
TAGS: ELAB, CA
To: STATE
OTTAWA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006